




**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT  
FOR NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHERS**

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**Virginia Commonwealth University**

**The Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute**

**L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs**

**Richmond, Virginia**

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT FOR NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHERS

A project administered by

The Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute  
L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs  
Virginia Commonwealth University

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# Professional Development Toolkit for New and Beginning Teachers



The PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT FOR NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHERS is a research-based video streamed program with accompanying resource documents. The program is an outgrowth of a previous Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute (CEPI) online mentoring study at Virginia Commonwealth University. The findings of the online mentoring study revealed twelve topics new and beginning teachers felt additional university training would have led them to more effective use of best practices in the classroom. In this program, each of the twelve topics is presented in two to six stand alone video segments. The total number of segments is forty five. Suggested uses, in addition to personal viewing by K-12 teachers for self improvement, include professional development, mentor and mentee, university prospective teacher, and small group or large group training.

The facilitators are university faculty and practitioners with field experience. Each is currently involved in teacher training or serves as a staff development administrator. All are currently engaged in educational research, teaching and/or educational policy development.

The teachers in the video programs are classroom teachers. Some of them were participants in the 2006 Online Mentoring Study in which the topics for this project were identified. They represent all disciplines in K-12 grades.

Resource documents for the programs are provided as PDF files to facilitate the use of the 45 video segments. The first set of documents is composed of: (1) a description of the project, (2) an introduction to program facilitators, including a definition of each topic, and a list of the video segments, and (3) a research formative study summary that helped to guide the project's development. The second set of documents is composed of: (1) a description of the project, (2) a full text transcript for each video segment, (3) a set of problems and solutions related to each video segment in the form of a work-study guide, and (4) an annotated bibliographic summary of references and Internet links for each transcript. Many of the organizations and agencies referenced in the transcripts are actively involved in the development of video and professional development presentations that support policy and advocacy.

Every reasonable effort is made to present current and accurate information. Internet content, however, does appear, disappear and change over time. CEPI, as a university-based educational policy research institute endorses no specific position of any listed group.

## PARENT COMMUNICATION

### SEGMENT #2: POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH SCHOOL

#### VIDEO SEGMENT TRANSCRIPT

**Parent Communication:** Communication strategies that can be used with parents to promote home and community support for student learning.

**Facilitator:** Dr. [Bill Boshier](#), Jr. Distinguished Professor  
Educational and Government Leadership and School Improvement  
Virginia Commonwealth University.

AUDIO	VIDEO
<p>There is little disagreement among educators that children benefit when parents are involved with schools in a positive way. Parent involvement is recognized as an important force in the lives of children. Yet according to the National Center for Family Literacy, teachers know the value of parent involvement but they do not know "how" to get some parents involved.</p> <p>I am Bill Boshier, Executive Director of the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute and VCU Distinguished Professor of Public Policy and Education. How can a school engage parents in positive ways?</p> <p>The Pennsylvania State Education Association admits that there are significant barriers to meaningful parent involvement in many schools. Some barriers were revealed in the published results of a survey of low income parents and parents of color. The results indicate that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. 80% of parents felt that they do not have time to be involved in the child's school.</li><li>2. One third of parents surveyed felt they have nothing to contribute to their child's education.</li><li>3. One third of the parents felt that they do not know how to become involved.</li><li>4. About one-fourth of the parents felt intimidated about being involved.</li></ol> <p>To address these and other similar findings, the Mississippi Board of Education published a Parent, School and Community Involvement Guide in 2004. "Suggestions for Successful Parental Involvement" include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Communication. Foster a climate that demonstrates that parent participation is valued. Invite participation in school activities, provide progress reports, monitor communication regularly and provide information—in a variety of ways.</li><li>2. Parenting Skills. Use materials, displays, and links to parent resources to establish a parent family resource center. Partner with community organizations to receive assistance with the establishment of parent involvement policies and practices, and seek</li></ol>	<p><b>DR. BOSHER</b></p>

collaboration to prevent violence and anti-social behavior.

3. Student Learning Programs. Assign homework that encourages family interaction, educate and inform parents about differences in how children learn and are motivated.

4. Volunteer Programs. Establish a policy to screen volunteers to ensure school safety and security, Next, develop a database to assist with the selection of the right volunteer activities for parents.

Doing what is right for some parents may not always be the right thing to do for other parents. This is noted in "Stepping Stones to Success", a guide developed by the Department of School Improvement, Virginia Department of Education in 2006. Fourteen topics of particular interest to new and beginning teachers include "Making the Most of the Mentor" and "Collaboration with Parents". Ideas under these topics include selection of the right time to telephone parents, how to make contacts positive, asking parents for their perspective and suggestions, recognizing cultural differences and providing helpful information.

Finding the best communication mode for each parent is not easy for a new teacher when a task such as this one is combined with other teaching and non-teaching demands especially in a classroom with students that have many needs beyond academic needs. A listing of teacher non-teaching demands might include bus duty, after school retention, school leadership duties, grant writing, events planning and implementation, and mentoring.

Let's see how some teachers engaged their parents in positive ways when assisting with non-teaching activities in the early years of teaching and today.

My name is Sharon Brown. I am a middle school teacher. I have taught for 1 year. When I first began teaching, I knew I should get parents involved. I had read about and heard my instructors talk about the value of parental involvement. I was uncertain about the most positive ways of getting my parents involved, especially in non-teaching classroom activities. It took me a while to learn that parent involvement in one classroom may not mean the same thing in another classroom. I listened to what other teachers were doing but soon came to the realization that one of the first things I needed to do was to learn all I could about the interests and talents of my parents. Once I began to assign non-teaching tasks according to the interests and talents of my parents, I was surprised to see how much they contributed to my success as a teacher.

**SHARON  
BROWN**

My name is Andrew Givens and this is my fifth year of teaching. For the last four years I have taught at Wilder Middle School. I have often found that some of my best parental interactions have come when I attend activities outside of the classroom. As a coach, I often work with students after school and get a chance to talk to their parents at matches. In many ways this provides an introduction to parents where we have a chance to talk in a more informal and less threatening atmosphere. I also try to go to many school-related activities such as dances, sports, games, band performances, and PTA meetings. I know that this is often a daunting task for new teachers because there are so many other things to do and we have our own lives and families. However, I think that it is a valuable experience and opportunity. First, you get to see the kids in a different light. You do not see them as just the child who is the most significant challenge in your class, but a child with his or her own special interests. Also, it may not seem

**ANDREW  
GIVENS**

like a big deal, but for many children and parents, it is a huge confidence boost for them to see someone taking an interest in them and their lives outside of school.

PTA's across the country have done research on the impact of parental involvement. It always shows that when parents are involved with their children, the achievement of young children increases. Let's make sure that schools are places that include parents.

**DR. BOSHER**



## PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

**Ask yourself:** How are you currently partnering with families and the community to improve learning in your classroom? What is going well? What would you like to change or improve in the future? What are you worrying about?

Suggested use for this module:

**1. Analyze:**

Please select one of the scenarios below and problem-solve a list of possible solutions. Record your ideas in the space provided. Discuss these ideas with your other educators (mentor, colleagues, or other beginning teachers).

**2. View:**

Watch the corresponding video on this topic. How does this information change your ideas?

**3. Compare:**

Revisit the scenario selected. Next, review the section entitled, "Possible Solutions" comparing the ideas listed with your own list.

**4. Reflect:**

How will you apply this new information to your current or future classroom? What goal will you set to help you begin to change your practices? What support is needed to help you accomplish this goal?

**5. Apply:**

List the first step towards change below. Create a timeline for success and place deadlines in your personal planner as a reminder. How will you know when you have met your goals?

### Scenarios 1 & 2: Parent Communication

#### Scenario 1

A parent calls and emails constantly asking for information about upcoming events and probing for information about situations taking place in the classroom setting. Just yesterday, you replied to a request for field trip dates for the year and costs for the theatre assembly occurring next week. Another phone message arrives today while you are teaching science related to school supplies. How should you respond to this parent?

## Scenario 2

As a beginning teacher, you recognize the need to partner with families to improve learning. You are attending evening activities and almost no parents are attending. Also, you have five parents who have not scheduled mandatory meetings for this year and are not responding to your note home. How can you meet the needs of all the families of your students?

Circle the scenario that you selected below:

Scenario 1

Scenario 2

Record a list of your own possible solutions here:

Summary & Goal Setting:

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

### Building Parental Involvement

#### Communication

- Always begin with the positive. Good news phone calls or postcards sent early in the year develop a positive relationship and provide families with timely and specific comments about their child.



- Newsletters, letters of notification, and materials should use language and vocabulary which are easily understood by all parents.
- As you design newsletters, consider the following tips:
  - ✓ Don't overwhelm. Families are likely to read something short and informational rather than a lengthy document. Try sending communications home every few weeks instead of a longer version four to five times a year.
  - ✓ Work collaboratively. Creating a joint newsletter with others on your grade level will divvy up the work load and increase the quality of your communications.
  - ✓ Spotlight student work. Consider including a one-page section which highlights cooperative learning projects or individual work. Rotate the students who are being showcased.
  - ✓ Create a standard newsletter format. Recurring columns or features makes your writing tasks much easier. Suggestions include: Calendar/ Upcoming Activities, Parenting Tips/Resources, 'Frequently-asked Questions' section, Instructional technique or weekly activity, Quotes or visuals, 'Don't Forget' section highlighting key event details, Special thanks, websites, and/or Volunteer Opportunities.
- Always hold conversations in appropriate locations (classroom rather than hallways).
- Send home a form at the start of the year which asks parents if they are willing to volunteer and in what capacity. Have a space for volunteers to work in and provide volunteers with meaningful tasks to complete (such as listening to children read or publishing writing).

## Scheduling

- Days, times, and location of events are flexible to ensure that all parents can attend some of your events. Many parents may travel or work during the evenings, so occasional early morning and/or weekend activities invite all families to participate in school activities.

## Parent Conferences

- Give parents plenty of notice when scheduling conferences. Smile and greet them at the classroom door. Thank the parent for taking the time to come and work together with the school.
- Begin conferences in a relaxed manner (consider coffee or refreshments) and be professional and understanding throughout the conversation. Start with something that is going well and then ask the parent to tell you more about their child. Often, parents will initiate or broach a difficult subject first making the conversation much easier to conduct. Consider sitting face-to-face next to one another rather than conducting the conference or meetings across a desk.
- If you are holding multiple conferences on a particular day, establish a waiting area outside the classroom with a couple of chairs and a conference schedule. This will prevent disruptions by parents who arrive early or at the wrong appointment time. Place photos of classroom projects, newsletters,

or a classroom-created book on the chairs to provide parents with something to browse while they wait.

- Make sure everything is graded and all assessments are up-to-date prior to scheduling your conferences. Demonstrate suggestions or concerns by 'showing' rather than 'telling'. For example, if you are concerned that a student is rushing through assignments, display a sample paper which serves as an example of this concern. Always have a copy of previous report cards to refer back to as needed during the conference.
- Let your parents know that you are willing to stop and answer questions at any point along the way. Listen and find positive points throughout the conversation.
- Create a file folder with copies of sheets addressing typical concerns (reading strategies, homework help, curriculum overviews, school calendars) at your conference table. During the conference, it will then be easy to pull out and distribute these forms as needed.
- Be respectful and end on time. Families may have childcare or other meetings. Sticking to your schedule will benefit everyone.
- End the conference by reviewing one or two key points for improvement as well as a student strength. Some schools use a parent meeting form to document progress and suggestions during conferences. If you are summarizing the content of your meeting on a form, have the parent sign it and provide a copy right away for them to take home. This allows the parent to leave with the critical information in hand and eliminates the need to remember to copy and send the form home at a later date.

## ANNOTATED RESEARCH BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ❖ Parents of culturally diverse students can be an untapped resource in today's classrooms. Care should be taken to keep parents informed through communication.

Hicks, Cathy; Glasgow, Neal & McNary, Sarah J. (2005). *What successful mentors do*. CA:Corwin Press, p. 177.

- ❖ Allow students to work in small groups to preview their homework assignments to ensure that all understand the assignment. This also helps parents who may not be able to read the assignment in English.

Hicks, Cathy; Glasgow, Neal & McNary, Sarah. (2005). *What successful mentors do*. CA:Corwin Press, p. 177.

- ❖ As a "new teacher on the block," try to talk to others familiar with the student before making calls or planning conferences with parents.

Hicks, Cathy; Glasgow, Neal & McNary, Sarah. (2005). *What successful mentors do*. CA:Corwin Press, p. 183.

- ❖ Being organized and prepared in advance of the parent-teacher conference with potential solutions to the problems a teacher expects to hear can reap rewards with increased communication and rapport with parents.

Hicks, Cathy; Glasgow, Neal & McNary, Sarah J. (2005). *What successful mentors do*. CA:Corwin Press, p. 183.

- ❖ Teachers say parents may not make the first move but generally will respond when asked to help at home or play role in the classroom. Some teachers involve parents in academic activities such as reading and tutoring, while other teachers turn to parents to relieve them of duties that otherwise would get in the way of teaching.

*Become a teacher: survival guide for new teachers*. (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2007, from <http://www.ed.gov/teachers/become/about/survivalguide/parent.html>

- ❖ Contact parents early before a problem occurs, particularly when there's good news to report.

*Become a teacher: survival guide for new teachers*. (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2007, from <http://www.ed.gov/teachers/become/about/survivalguide/survguide.pdf>

- ❖ Address parents' concerns head on. If you are taking a pedagogical approach that raises questions, work to show parents the benefits of your methods and explain your reasoning to them.

*Become a teacher: survival guide for new teachers*. (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2007, from <http://www.ed.gov/teachers/become/about/survivalguide/survguide.pdf>

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